

Auburn, Calif.

Feb? 6th, 1933.

My Dear Richard:

I have been meaning to answer your letters for some time, but have been pretty busy with the drafting of some new work, and felt also that some of your questions could not be answered hastily.

I am glad that Ebony and Crystal appeals to you. No, you didn't hint for the book--you need have no uneasiness on that score. My sending it to you was a whim, if you like, and was prompted solely by the intuition that the poems might mean more to you than to most other readers. As to my other volumes, including The Star-Treader, I regret to say that I have no extra copies of them on hand, and fear that they are all out of print. Markham, by the way, was slightly in error, since I have published four volumes, including the de luxe reprint volume, Odes and ~~Sonnets~~ Sonnets, brought out in 1918 by the California Book Club. sandalwood, my last collection, was printed by the Auburn Journal in 1925, and is wholly sold out. It is possible that you might obtain The Star-Treader from the publisher, A.M. Robertson, 222 Stockton St. San Francisco; but a copy will probably cost \$3.00, since R. was putting up the price on the few that he had left a year or two ago. As to the boy-poet hooey, the San Francisco papers were responsible for that, when The Star-Treader (written mostly at the age of 18) appeared back in 1912.

*real/*  
The Hashish-Eater is my own favorite. You are the first person, as far as I know, who has commented on a likeness to Wilde in some of the shorter poems; but the likeness exists, it seems to me. The Sphinx (I don't care greatly for the bulk of Wilde's verse) made a tremendous impression on me. As for the near-blasphemy of some of the poems--well, I was young once! It needn't be taken too seriously; and, as some one or other has pointed out, blasphemy is possible only to those who believe. It is merely the obverse side of reverence and piety.

*formal*  
This brings me to your query as to whether religion is compatible with a taste for weird literature. Most emphatically, I should say that it is: a person sensitive to the weird and horrific and terrific is pretty likely to have an apprehension of spirituality and things beyond the veil. Personally, I have no fixed belief, but maintain an open and non-skeptical attitude. Henry S. Whitehead, one of the best of the Weird Tales contributors, was, as you perhaps know, a minister of the Gospel; and look at the Rev. Montague Summers, who has written monumental monographs on the vampire tradition, witchcraft, etc. An essentially non-religious person, I am willing to wager, would care very little for weirdness, except perhaps, in the limited sense of purely physical horror and mundane gruesomeness. As to your own adjustment to religion, I wouldn't fret too much about that, if I were you, but would, so to speak, let the flower blossom naturally if the seed is there to blossom. Such things come in their own time, as they did to Huysmans, who was a non-believer in his younger years, but ended by becoming a Benedictine oblate.

as well as a large vocabulary.

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As to the acquirement of a vocabulary similar to mine, I don't know whether to recommend it or not! Seriously, though, I can give you a sort of recipe. Read authors who employ large vocabularies, and keep at hand a sheet of paper and a pencil, ~~which~~ with which to note down every unfamiliar word. Then, afterwards, look them up. Also, if you have the patience, the direct study of an unabridged dictionary, column by column, with a listing of new words that appeal to you, is highly salutary. Also, it is far more fascinating than you will imagine off-hand. By years of this sort of thing, and by studying the verbal usage of the masters, one can develop a refined instinct for values. In fact, I think there is virtually no limit to the conceivable degree of refinement. Words become live things, jewels and chameleons, they take on fire and color and wizardry, as one learns more about them.

Re the illustration for The Hashish-Eater: I am going to mail you an old one presently--one that was made about, or shortly after, the time of writing. Drawing is purely a matter of mood with me, and I can not at present undertake to do anything new.

Yes, Astounding Stories and Strange Tales are sunk, all-right, "sunk without trace". Too bad.

Thanks for the letter-writing offer. That would be fine, if you see something of mine in a magazine that you particularly like. It seems to be the only way by which editors can keep tab on the preferences of their readers.

Cordially,

Clark Ashton Smith